DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 462 670 CG 031 620

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TITLE Leading and Managing Comprehensive School Guidance Programs. ERIC/CASS Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services, Greensboro, NC.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-CG-01-07
PUB DATE 2001-11-00
NOTE 4p.
CONTRACT ED-99-CO-0014
AVAILABLE FROM ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 201 Ferguson Building, P.O. Box 26171, Greensboro, NC 27402-6171. Tel: 336-334-4114; Tel: 800-414-9769 (Toll Free); Fax: 336-334-4116; e-mail: ericcass@uncg.edu; Web site: http://ericcass.uncg.edu.
PUB TYPE ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Comprehensive Programs; Cooperation; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidance Objectives; *Guidance Programs; Leadership Responsibility; *School Counseling
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

Fundamental beliefs and organizational structure represent an important part of comprehensive guidance programs serving students from pre-kindergarten through grade 12. These programs help students gain competencies in the areas of personal/social, educational, and career development at all educational levels. Comprehensive programs guarantee that all students have access to school counselors and school counselors have access to all students. A comprehensive school guidance program is implemented through a team approach that uses all staff members in roles appropriate to their training and competence. District and building guidance program leaders fulfill four roles: administrator, supervisor, manager, and professional leader. When guidance is conceptualized and implemented as a program in schools, with the appropriate leadership, it places guidance conceptually and structurally in the center of education and education reform. (JDM)

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By

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November 2001 EDO-CG-01-07

ERIC Clearinghouse on Counseling and Student Services
University of North Carolina at Greensboro

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Leading and Managing Comprehensive School Guidance Programs

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Introduction

"As soon as the first teachers were given part-time assignments as school counselors in the early 1900s, discussion began about what should be the nature, structure, position, and leadership of guidance. What should be the focus of guidance? How should guidance be organized and where should it be placed organizationally in a building/district? Who should lead and manage the program? What titles would best identify guidance program leaders? How should supervision be provided to school counselors and other program staff? How should school counselors and other program staff be evaluated and helped to improve their performance?" (Henderson & Gysbers, 1998 p. 3).

The questions that were asked about the nature, structure, position, and leadership of guidance in the early 1900s are still being asked today, almost 100 years later. However, given the evolution of guidance over the years from a position, to a set of services, to a program (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000), we are now able to more clearly answer these questions. The program concept for guidance provides us with an overall framework, an organizational system that specifies building and district level guidance program leadership roles. As a result this digest first focuses on the fundamental beliefs and the organizational structure of comprehensive guidance programs. Then attention is given to guidance program leader roles, titles, and functions that we feel are necessary to lead and manage comprehensive school guidance programs.

Fundamental Beliefs and Organizational Structure

A comprehensive school guidance program, in close collaboration with parents, serves all students pre-kindergarten through grade twelve. It helps all students gain competencies in the areas of personal/social, educational, and career development at all educational levels, competencies that underpin students' academic success. It serves equally all students, parents, teachers, and other recipients regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, cultural background, sexual orientation, disability, family structure and functionality, socioeconomic status, learning ability level, language, level of school involvement, or other special characteristics.

A comprehensive school guidance program guarantees that all students have access to school counselors and school counselors have access to all students. It helps develop and protect students' individuality and provides them with skills to function effectively with others in school, home, and community. It is developmental and preventative as well as remedial in design and implementation and is continuously refined and enhanced through systematic planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating.

A comprehensive school guidance program features a content element consisting of student competencies. There is an organizational framework element that contains three structural components (definition, rationale, assumptions), four program components (guidance curriculum, individual planning, responsive services, system support), and time allocations for the work of school counselors. Finally, there is a resources element that includes the human, financial, and political resources required to develop and operate the program effectively and efficiently.

A comprehensive school guidance program mandates that school counselors spend 100 percent of their time working in the program with non-guidance duties eliminated. It is put into operation through a five-stage change process of planning, designing, implementing, evaluating, and enhancing. It is evaluated through program, personnel, and results evaluation.

Leadership Roles

A comprehensive school guidance program is implemented through a team approach that uses all staff members in roles appropriate to their training and competence. It provides for the professional development of school counselors and other guidance program staff to ensure their competence to fully carry out their leadership as well as their implementation roles. It requires strong district and building leadership for program development, implementation, and advocacy and for school counselor and other guidance program staff professional development. District and building guidance program leaders fulfill four roles: administration, supervision, management, and professional leadership (Henderson & Gysbers, 1998).

Administration

In the administrative role, guidance program staff leaders have primary responsibility for and authority over the program and the staff. They establish systems for accountability of staff members, help them organize and implement the program, and evaluate the program's effectiveness and the quality of staff members' performance. Not only do they ensure the implementation of the designed program, but they also ensure its appropriateness within the context of the school building and district.

Supervision

In the supervision role, guidance program staff leaders assist their staff members to continuously learn new ways to improve their job performance, that is, their professional skills, the currency of their knowledge and information, and their work habits. Meaningful supervision is the result of firsthand observation and directly communicated feedback. It involves helping staff members increase their competence in carrying out their jobs in the guidance program by

conducting supervision as outlined in a district's performance improvement system. It is carried out in ways that are comparable with supervision provided by other department leaders for the members of their professional staffs.

Management

In the management role, guidance program staff leaders ensure the efficient use of the resources appropriated to the program. These resources include information provided through the administrative and other staff channels; materials, equipment, and budget appropriated to the department; and the talent and time of staff members. It includes governing and controlling other staff members to ensure that department goals and objectives are accomplished. In this role, guidance program leaders ensure the maintenance of the program and at least the minimum functioning of each staff member. They are the conduit for the school district, the school building, and the department.

Professional Leadership

In the leadership role, guidance program staff leaders influence the behaviors of their staff members in such ways that enhance not only their competence but also their commitment to the program, to the school, and to their profession. As leaders in the profession, they conduct as well as apply the outcomes of research in school counseling, education, and school counseling supervision.

Leadership Titles

Titles continue to vary in educational administrative structures. The definitive organizational pattern has yet to be found. Titles reflecting responsibilities vary from school district to school district. What is clear, however, is that whether they are in school district offices or in school buildings, guidance program staff leaders should have titles that reflect their administrative, management, supervisory, and professional leadership responsibilities and fit their placement in the organizational structure of the school system. Individuals with direct responsibility for the guidance program and direct contact with the school counseling staff should have guidance, counseling, or both in their titles (e.g., Assistant Superintendent for Guidance, Director of Guidance, Counselor Supervisor, Guidance Department Head, or Head Counselor).

Leadership Functions

There are six major leadership functions for district and building level guidance leaders to carry out in fulfilling their leadership roles. These functions are: (a) empowering school counselors to carry out program roles and responsibilities; (b) advocating for the guidance program and staff; (c) defining school counselors' jobs within the guidance program and, thereby, promoting maximum use of their competencies; (d) promoting professionalism of school counselors; (e) supervising; and (f) evaluating school counselors' performance. These strategies are applied by building and district guidance program staff leaders as defined by job descriptions based on appropriate application of their power bases, roles and competencies in the contexts of comprehensive guidance programs, school counselor performance improvement systems, and school buildings and districts.

Summary and Closing Thoughts

This digest focused on a topic of great concern to the profession, the topic of strong and appropriate district and building level leadership for comprehensive guidance programs in schools. It is a topic that the profession has wrestled with for almost 100 years. It is one that must be resolved if school counselors, working full-time within the framework and organizational structure of comprehensive guidance programs, are to reach and serve all students and their parents.

When guidance in the schools is conceptualized and implemented as a program, with the appropriate district and building level guidance leadership, it places guidance conceptually and structurally in the center of education and educational reform. It becomes an integral and transformative program, not a marginal and supplemental activity. When this occurs, school counselors can devote full time serving students and their parents, emphasizing students' academic success and their personal/social and career development.

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